

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A rack for storing generally sheet-like panels, the rack comprising:
  - (a) a generally horizontal base;
  - (b) a generally vertical central wall extending upwardly away from the base, the rack having panel storage areas on both sides of the central wall, each panel storage area being adapted to retain a plurality of panels each positioned generally parallel to the central wall and generally perpendicular to the base;
  - (c) one or more separating tiers each defined by one or more generally horizontal separating planks extending away from the central wall and being adapted to retain upper edge regions of panels stored in the rack; and
  - (d) one or more supporting tiers each defined by one or more generally horizontal supporting planks extending away from the central wall and being adapted to support lower edges of panels stored in the rack.
2. The rack of claim 1, wherein each separating plank is a cantilever beam attached at one end to the central wall.
3. The rack of claim 1, wherein each separating plank is adapted for being removably attached to the central wall at various heights, such that the rack can be adjusted to accommodate panels of various sizes.

4. The rack of claim 1, wherein each separating plank comprises a plurality of separating fingers, such fingers being spaced-apart along a length of each separating plank and being adapted to separate upper edge regions of adjacent panels stored in the rack.

5. The rack of claim 4, wherein a plurality of separating fingers are rotatably disposed on each separating plank.

6. The rack of claim 5, wherein each separating plank comprises a rigid beam extending from a rigid base flange that is attached rigidly and removably to the central wall.

7. The rack of claim 1, wherein each supporting plank comprises a panel-engagement pad, such a pad forming an upper portion of each supporting plank and being adapted to engage lower edges of panels stored in the rack.

8. The rack of claim 7, wherein each panel-engagement pad comprises a flexible material adapted for preventing breakage of panels resting on such a pad.

9. The rack of claim 7, wherein each panel-engagement pad comprises a rubberlike material.

10. The rack of claim 7, wherein each panel-engagement pad is formed of a material that is durable to repeated glass autoclave processing.

11. The rack of claim 10, wherein said durable material has a melting point of greater than about 300 °C.

12. The rack of claim 7, wherein each supporting plank comprises a receiving member, and each panel-engagement pad is removably attached to such a receiving member, such that a panel-engagement pad that is damaged or otherwise no longer desired can be replaced with a new panel-engagement pad.

13. The rack of claim 1, wherein the central wall comprises a plurality of spaced-apart generally vertical beams including one or more beams adapted for receiving separating planks at various heights and one or more beams adapted for receiving supporting planks at various heights.

14. The rack of claim 13, wherein the central wall comprises a plurality of beams adapted for receiving separating planks and a plurality of beams adapted for receiving supporting planks, such that separating planks and supporting planks can be mounted at various lateral positions on the central wall as well as at various heights.

15. The rack of claim 14, wherein the central wall comprises at least four beams adapted for receiving separating planks and at least four beams adapted for receiving

supporting planks, such that separating planks and supporting planks can be mounted at a wide variety of lateral positions on the central wall as well as at various heights.

16. The rack of claim 13, wherein each beam adapted for receiving separating planks defines a plurality of front openings spaced-apart along a vertical length of a front face of such beam.

17. The rack of claim 13, wherein each beam adapted for receiving supporting planks defines a plurality of side openings spaced-apart along a vertical length of a side face of such beam.

18. The rack of claim 16, wherein each front opening is adapted to receive a bolt extending from a base flange of a separating plank, through such front opening, through an aligned back opening in a back face of such beam, and into a nut, thereby securing such separating plank to such beam.

19. The rack of claim 17, wherein each side opening is adapted to receive a lynchpin extending from a first base flange of a supporting plank, through such side opening, through an aligned side opening in another side face of such beam, and through an opening in a second base flange of such supporting plank, thereby securing such supporting plank to such beam.

20. The rack of claim 17, wherein two fasteners adjoin an end of each supporting plank to one of the beams, such two fasteners extending through respective side openings in such beam.

21. The rack of claim 20, wherein the two fasteners are linchpins.

22. The rack of claim 1, wherein the supporting planks and the separating planks extend substantially the same distance away from the central wall as does the base, such that panels can be stored in the rack along substantially the entire distance between the central wall and a distal end of the base.

23. The rack of claim 1, wherein a first tier of separating planks is positioned a first vertical distance above a first tier of supporting planks, so as to accommodate a first tier of panels stored in the rack.

24. The rack of claim 23, wherein the base comprises the first tier of supporting planks.

25. The rack of claim 23, further comprising a second tier of supporting planks above the first tier of separating planks, and a second tier of separating planks positioned a second vertical distance above the second tier of supporting planks, so as to accommodate a second tier of panels stored in the rack.

26. The rack of claim 25, wherein the first tier of separating planks, the second tier of supporting planks, and the second tier of separating planks can each be positioned at different heights on the central wall, such that the first and second vertical distances can be adjusted, thereby allowing panels of various sizes to be stored in first and second storage tiers of the rack, and allowing panels of one size to be stored in one storage tier while panels of another size are stored in another storage tier.

27. The rack of claim 1, wherein the rack is adapted to accommodate at least two storage tiers of panels on each side of the central wall.

28. The rack of claim 27, wherein the rack can be adjusted such that each storage tier on each side of the central wall can accommodate panels of various sizes.

29. The rack of claim 27, wherein the rack can be adjusted such that one storage tier on a given side of the central wall can accommodate panels of one size, while another storage tier on the same side of the central wall can accommodate panels of a different size.

30. The rack of claim 1, wherein the rack is sized, shaped, and configured to fit inside a glass laminating autoclave.

31. The rack of claim 1, wherein the rack is provided with a plurality of wheels, such that the rack can be rolled into and out of a glass laminating autoclave.

32. The rack of claim 31, wherein the wheels are castor wheels extending downwardly from the base.

33. The rack of claim 1, wherein the rack is constructed of material that is durable to repeated glass autoclave processing.

34. The rack of claim 33, wherein the rack is constructed of material having a melting point of greater than about 300 °C.

35. A method of providing storage for generally sheet-like panels, the method comprising:

- (a) providing a rack comprising:
  - (i) a generally horizontal base;
  - (ii) a generally vertical central wall extending upwardly away from the base, the rack having panel storage areas on both sides of the central wall, each panel storage area being adapted to retain a plurality of panels each positioned generally parallel to the central wall and generally perpendicular to the base; and
- (b) attaching one or more generally horizontal separating planks to the central wall, such that each separating plank extends away from the central wall and is adapted to retain upper edge regions of panels stored in the rack.

36. The method of claim 35, wherein each separating plank is mounted on the central wall as a cantilever beam by attaching one end of each separating plank to the central wall.

37. The method of claim 36, wherein each separating plank is mounted on the central wall by attaching one end of each separating plank to the central wall using a bolt and a corresponding nut.

38. The method of claim 35, wherein each separating plank is attached removably to the central wall.

39. The method of claim 35, wherein each separating plank comprises a rigid beam extending from a rigid base flange, and wherein the base flange of each separating plank is attached rigidly and removably to the central wall.

40. The method of claim 35, further comprising attaching one or more generally horizontal supporting planks to the central wall, such that each supporting plank extends away from the central wall and is adapted to support lower edges of panels stored in the rack.

41. The method of claim 40, wherein the central wall comprises a plurality of generally vertical beams, and wherein two fasteners are used to attach one end of each

supporting plank to one of the beams, such two fasteners being extended through respective side openings in such beam.

42. The method of claim 41, wherein one end of each supporting plank is mounted to a beam of the central wall by extending two lynchpins through a side of such beam.

43. The method of claim 40, wherein each supporting plank comprises a panel-engagement pad adapted to engage lower edges of panels stored in the rack, and wherein each supporting plank is attached to the central wall such that a panel-engagement pad forms an upper portion of each supporting plank.

44. The method of claim 43, wherein each supporting plank comprises a rigid beam, and wherein each panel-engagement pad is secured removably to such a rigid beam.

45. The method of claim 35, wherein a first tier of separating planks is positioned a first vertical distance above a first tier of supporting planks, so as to accommodate a first tier of panels stored in the rack.

46. The method of claim 45, further comprising positioning a second tier of supporting planks above the first tier of separating planks, and positioning a second tier of separating planks a second vertical distance above the second tier of supporting planks, so as to accommodate a second tier of panels stored in the rack.

47. The method of claim 35, wherein separating planks and supporting planks are attached to the central wall such that the rack accommodates at least two storage tiers of panels on each side of the central wall.

48. A method of storing generally sheet-like panels, the method comprising:

(a) providing a rack comprising:

(i) a generally horizontal base;

(ii) a generally vertical central wall extending upwardly away from the base, the rack having panel storage areas on both sides of the central wall, each panel storage area being adapted to retain a plurality of panels each positioned generally parallel to the central wall and generally perpendicular to the base;

(iii) one or more generally horizontal separating planks extending away from the central wall and being adapted to retain upper edge regions of panels stored in the rack;

(iv) one or more generally horizontal supporting planks extending away from the central wall and being adapted to support lower edges of panels stored in the rack; and

(b) positioning at least one panel in a stored position on the rack by securing the panel between at least one desired supporting plank and at least one desired separating plank.

49. The method of claim 48, wherein each separating plank comprises a plurality of separating fingers, such fingers being spaced-apart along a length of each separating plank, the method comprising positioning said panel in said stored position by securing an upper edge region of said panel between two adjacent separating fingers.

50. The method of claim 48, wherein the method comprises positioning said panel in said stored position by placing a lower edge of said panel on top of a panel-engagement pad forming an upper portion of said desired supporting plank.

51. The method of claim 48, wherein said desired supporting plank and said desired separating plank each extend substantially the same distance away from the central wall as does the base, and wherein panels are positioned in the rack along substantially the entire distance between the central wall and a distal end of the base.

52. The method of claim 48, wherein a first tier of separating planks is positioned a first vertical distance above a first tier of supporting planks, the method comprising storing a first tier of panels in the rack by securing such first tier of panels between the first tier of supporting planks and the first tier of separating planks.

53. The method of claim 52, wherein a second tier of supporting planks is positioned above the first tier of separating planks, and a second tier of separating planks is positioned a second vertical distance above the second tier of supporting planks, the method further comprising storing a second tier of panels in the rack by securing such

second tier of panels between the second tier of supporting planks and the second tier of separating planks.

54. The method of claim 48, wherein the method comprises securing at least two storage tiers of panels on each side of the central wall.

55. The method of claim 48, wherein the method comprises configuring and loading the rack such that one storage tier on a given side of the central wall accommodates and carries panels of one size, while another storage tier on the same side of the central wall accommodates and carries panels of a different size.

56. The method of claim 48, wherein the method further comprises positioning the loaded rack inside a glass laminating autoclave.

57. A rack for storing generally sheet-like panels, the rack comprising:

- (a) a generally planar base;
- (b) a generally planar central wall extending away from the base in a generally perpendicular fashion, the rack having panel storage areas on both sides of the central wall, each panel storage area being adapted to retain a plurality of panels each positioned generally parallel to the central wall and generally perpendicular to the base;

- (c) one or more separating planks each adapted to be secured to the central wall so as to extend away from the central wall and each being adapted to retain upper edge regions of panels stored in the rack; and
- (d) one or more supporting planks each adapted to be secured to the central wall so as to extend away from the central wall and each being adapted to support lower edges of panels stored in the rack.